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RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 9258
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 002854

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SUBJECT: A/S HILL'S MEETING WITH MOD PERMANENT SECRETARY
WINAI

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce. Reason 1.4 (a and d)

11. (C) Summary. In a May 22 meeting with Thai Ministry of Defense Permanent Secretary GEN Winai Phattiyakul, A/S Hill urged the Royal Thai Government to fulfill its commitment to hold elections by year's end and return to parliamentary democracy. Winai, who is also Secretary General of the ruling Council for National Security (CNS), assured Hill that he was "quite confident" that Thailand would conduct a Constitutional referendum and hold national elections according to the timeline publicly announced by Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont. Winai also told Hill "on behalf of myself, (CNS leader) GEN Sonthi and the entire CNS" that there were no plans to stage a "re-coup" and that, irrespective of the upcoming court decision that could disband Thailand's two largest political parties, he remained certain that elections would take place as planned. End Summary.

12. (U) Participants

U.S.
EAP Assistant Secretary Christopher Hill
Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce
Defense Attache Col Steve McKeag
EAP Special Assistant Tom Gibbons
Political Military Officer Mark Lambert

Thai
GEN Winai Phattiyakul, MOD Permanent Secretary and Secretary General of the Council for National Security
LTG Naraset Issarangkul na Ayudhya, MOD Deputy Director of Plans and Policy
LTG Prapat Svaithphanu, MOD Political Military Coordinator to MFA
Notetakers

STICK TO THE TIMETABLE -- THE CONSTITUTION

13. (C) In a business-like meeting at the Ministry of Defense, EAP Assistant Secretary Christopher Hill asked MOD Permanent Secretary GEN Winai Phattiyakul for his assessment of the current political situation and prospects for the return to parliamentary democracy. While noting how press stories painted an "uncertain" picture of the situation, Winai said he was "quite confident" that Thailand would return to parliamentary democracy according to the timetable publicly spelled out by PM Surayud. Winai noted that the Constitution drafting process was going well and reports from

relevant agencies led him to believe that the Constitution Drafting Assembly would make the "necessary amendments" to the draft constitution with enough time left for it to be submitted to the Thai electorate on September 2. This would allow time to prepare for the general election, he said. Hill noted the upcoming U.S.-ASEAN Summit would take place later in September and suggested that a positive outcome of the Constitutional referendum might be highlighted at that meeting.

STICK TO THE TIMETABLE -- GENERAL ELECTIONS

14. (C) Hill pressed for Winai's opinion on the timetable to hold a general election. Winai said "we are all confident -- Surayud, Sonthi and I -- that we will hold a general election in mid or late December." Winai then expressed his own personal concern that the general election not mar the celebration of the King's 80th birthday on December 5. "It would be improper for politician's campaign posters to supplant portraits of the King," he said, adding that he personally favored elections later than December 16 -- perhaps December 23 -- in order to deconflict the two events.

A/S Hill and Ambassador Boyce underscored the importance of having elections in 2007 -- noting the damage to Thailand's reputation if the RTG's public promise to hold elections in 2007 were to slip. "You promised elections by the end of the year and that's what is expected," Hill emphasized.

NO NEW COUP

15. (C) Hill pointed to recent reports in the Thai press suggesting that some within the CNS were considering a "re-coup" to oust Surayud. Winai responded "I can tell you on behalf of GEN Sonthi and the entire CNS that we have no

BANGKOK 00002854 002 OF 002

intention of staging another coup." "The Thai media is prone to exaggeration," Winai observed, suggesting that recent statements by Defense Minister Boonrawd Somtas and other members of the Cabinet urging anti-CNS demonstrators to show patience with the timetable for elections had been taken out of context.

WHAT ABOUT THE COURT DECISION THAT MIGHT DISBAND POLITICAL PARTIES?

16. (C) Turning to the anticipated May 30 decision before the Constitutional Tribunal that could disband both the Thai Rak Thai (TRT) and Democrat political parties for election irregularities in 2006, Ambassador Boyce asked whether under the worst case scenario -- in which both parties would be disbanded and hundreds of politicians barred from politics for up to five years -- Thailand could still conduct a credible national election in December. Winai said that he was confident that elections would take place even under this worst case scenario. While quick to point out the independence of the court in the matter, Winai expressed his understanding that the Tribunal actually possessed the flexibility to punish either or both parties and even ban a number of individuals from politics, yet stop short of what would amount to a wholesale purge of most of the Thai political class. "If a decision is announced on May 30 that bans both parties and some key leaders," Winai suggested, "it would be no big deal at all because enough politicians would remain to participate in the election."

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP AND THE DARFUR DEPLOYMENT

17. (C) Winai thanked Hill for the USG's agreement to participate in this year's Cobra Gold military exercise, noting his understanding that it was a difficult decision to make in Washington. He stressed the need for Thailand and the United States to continue to work together in support of regional stability. Along those lines, MOD Deputy for Policy and Plans LTG Naraset Issarangkul na Ayudhya explained that

the Royal Thai Supreme Command was working on a possible Thai deployment in support of the UN Darfur mission -- as requested by Washington. Noting that much work remained, Naraset indicated that Thailand was considering deploying about 280 engineers to Darfur.

18. (U) A/S Hill did not have an opportunity to clear this cable.
BOYCE